

Synopsis Use of U.S. Parcel Post Stamps 1913-1926

This exhibit highlights the use of the 17 service specific stamps issued and restricted to use on parcel post matter mailed under the classification of the new Parcel Post Service. This exhibit has two distinct periods, the first period 1/1/13 to 6/30/13 is the RESTRICTED USE period, when only Parcel Post and Parcel Postage Due stamps could frank Parcel Post mail matter and from 7/1/13 to 1926 is the UNRESTRICTED USE period when Parcel Post and Parcel Postage Due stamps could be used on any mail matter and ordinary stamps and commemoratives could be used on Parcel Post mail matter.

After years of lobbying, especially by the RFD (Rural Free Delivery) Carriers, and attempts by Senator Bourne brought the framework of a Parcel Post System successfully before the US Congress. His bill was passed in August 1912 with the inception set for January 1, 1913 and creating a race against time. The new Parcel Post System was the biggest change in mail service during the 20th Century with many features in use, unchanged today more than 100 years later while being used as the basis for or part of other new postal services such as Air Mail, Air Parcel Post, Priority and Express Mail. This complex system came on line so fast that the 3¢, 50¢ and \$1.00 stamps were neither issued nor available until after the start of the service. Of the three, the 3¢ was the earliest used with the EKV in April 1913. Certain required forms and devices for the Parcel Post Service were still being distributed less than a week prior to January 1, 1913.

The new Parcel Post System made revolutionary changes regarding mail matter size, weight, distance calculation, indemnity and payment of goods. The size allowed, determined by the combination of length and girth, started at 72 inches, rose to 84 inches in 1915 and to the 130 inches allowed today. The weight limit was set initially at 11 lbs from the pre-January 1913 mail matter limit of 4 lbs., with the maximum raised in steps to 20, 50 and 70 lbs. by 1918. The 70 lbs. maximum continues as the standard for all classes of mail today.

Insured mail was created and available 1/1/1913 for all domestic destination Parcel Post matter. Insurance indemnity did not apply to foreign destination parcel post matter rather it could be "Registered" to destinations allowing same. Collect on Delivery (C.O.D.) began on 7/1/1913 which both provided indemnity and payment for goods at time of postal delivery.

The Parcel Post System proved so successful that two postage rate DECREASES occurred, first in 1913 and again in 1914. Insurance fees were also reduced and maximum value cover increased.

Only first class mail was required to be canceled at the office of acceptance with the city, state, date and time, however per order, Parcel Post matter was only required to be cancelled with the city name and state. This had the intended benefit to obscure the delivery transit time of this mail matter (this also applied to the second and third class items shown during the Unrestricted Use Period). Such "mute" cancellation devices were supplied to the large post offices. Therefore, most usages of parcel post service stamps are undated. Small post offices at times overlooked this and dated the item when canceling the stamps. Consequently dating Parcel Post matter is done by other dated markings, e.g. transit and receiving markings, dated receipts for Insurance, COD, docketing or dating of contents or wrapper by the sender. This exhibit strives purposely to select fully dated Parcel Post usages or usages dated to a period range based upon the combination of information on or in the Parcel Post matter, the postage paid and the distance designated by the zone system.

The very nature of Parcel Post matter caused damage to the stamps, whether on the parcel or affixed to a mailing tag or address label attached to the parcel. After allowing for damaged stamp destruction, one must remember during the period of use of the Parcel Post stamps, collectors normally did not retain nor save entire wrappers and tags. If retained, it was for soaking removal of the stamps. This makes any parcel post use found intact quite scarce also limiting the condition factor.

This exhibit focuses on the use of the 17 stamps; thus, there are neither essays nor proofs included. It is not a true rate study of parcel post or other classes of mail, but examples will demonstrate how to calculate Parcel Post postage rates and fees, show uses of all eight distance zones, local (single office) and the 4 oz and under not restricted by distance rates as well as providing an overview of the domestic and foreign rate structure. The exhibit has multiple examples of all 17 denominations used on all classes of mail and associated special services.

I do not know of any recorded uses of Parcel Post Due stamps in the restricted use period. All Parcel Post matter during that time was to be handled at the Post Office of mailing to determine the distance and weight for determining the rate. The Parcel Post stamps were then applied. The Parcel Post Due stamps were to be used for forwarding, returns and incoming foreign delivery charges.

The Parcel Post service included "special handling" beginning in 1925. This is not shown in this exhibit, as there are no parcel post/special handling stamp combination dated covers recorded.

One strong complaint by contemporary post personnel was that the 12 Parcel Post stamps were the same color, thus making it difficult to quickly determine the denomination of the stamp. This identification issue plagues this exhibit as well regarding location of the various high value stamps. Therefore I am including location information. The 50¢ (six examples) and 75¢ (nine examples) and \$1.00 (five examples) Parcel Post and 25¢ Parcel Postage Due values can be found in these sections:

- Restricted Use Period – Zones (50¢)
- Unrestricted Use Period
 - First Class Use (2 – 50¢, 2 – 75¢, 2 – \$1.00, 1 – 25¢ PPPD)
 - Territories, Possessions and Postal Agencies (2 – 50¢, 3 – 75¢)
 - Parcel Post (1 – 50¢, 3 – 75¢, 3 – \$1.00, 2 – 25¢ PPPD)
 - Indemnity (1 – 75¢)

Significant Items Include:

- First Day of Parcel Post Service January 1, 1913
- One-ounce parcel tag with original sample still attached
- Goodman Rain Coat Cover with samples
- Local Delivery Parcel Post Use
- U.S.P.O.D. Official Parcel Post Map, Post Office Unit Guide and Tape Measure Line
- First class first day cover and card, July 1, 1913 (four usages)
- Multicolored advertising covers with Parcel Post stamps
- Mourning Covers
- Special service uses, Registered and Special Delivery, Insured
- Earliest recorded use of the 10¢ Parcel post stamp paying the Registered Fee, July 2, 1913
- Properly used commercial example of a block of 45/\$1.00 and a full used pane of the 3¢ Parcel Post stamps
- Usages of the 50¢, 75¢, and \$1.00 Parcel Post stamps in 1st class and Parcel Post use
- Registered Sea Post transit marking
- Registered Shanghai China to Switzerland use
- Second class use

- Registered foreign printed matter
- Usages 10¢ and 25¢ Parcel Post Due stamps
- Incoming 5¢ Parcel Post Due delivery charge use
- WWI war tax usage in combination with Parcel Post Stamps

In addition to the expected backbone examples anticipated in an exhibit of this subject, this exhibit features a number of covers and “pieces” which are either scarce or the only recorded example. The most significant items of this category are highlighted with a blue dot. 

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